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SUBJECT: SENIOR MP SAYS THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT FOR IRAQI  
ELECTIONS; QUESTIONS GOK POSITION ON WOMEN'S VOTING RIGHTS

REF: KUWAIT 3897

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: During a December 1 courtesy call by Ambassador LeBaron, Chairman of the National Assembly Committee on Foreign Affairs, MP Mohammed Jassam Al-Sager (also Al-Sager), was not shy about his views on Iraq, U.S. policy successes and failures, and the effectiveness of the Government of Kuwait. He praised the U.S. for liberating both Kuwait and Iraq and said coalition efforts in Iraq will benefit the entire region. Nevertheless, he is not convinced that elections in January 2005 will help Iraqis. He believes religious extremists will rise to power and, backed by Iran, pose a threat to all Gulf countries. He supports the U.S. positions on Iran and Lebanon, but thought it would have been better for the U.S. to have communicated its concerns bilaterally and through allies. In contrast, he recommended the U.S. speak up on the rise of Islamists in Kuwait and the need for greater rights for women. He said if the government was serious about forgiving Iraq's debt and obtaining voting rights for women, it could easily pass legislation. He was equally critical of the National Assembly, chastising MPs who question the assignment of U.S. envoys to Kuwait who previously served in Israel, but who do not oppose Arab governments which have diplomatic representation in Israel. The Ambassador raised the need for speedy ratification of the Article 98 Agreement and Al-Sager said he would do his best to expedite the process. End Summary.

Liberation Is Good for Iraq, Elections Aren't

2. (C) Opening the conversation with a discussion on Iraq, Al-Sager said Kuwait is eternally grateful to the U.S. for liberating it in 1991 and for ousting Saddam Hussein. He noted there might be disagreements over policy, but the U.S. could always consider Kuwait a good friend in the region. He considered recent military action in Falluja necessary and opined that the number of civilians killed in firefights between coalition forces and insurgents is small when compared to the innocent Iraqis killed by Hussein. Despite his support for U.S. actions in Iraq, however, he questioned the need for elections in January. He argued that Iraqis don't need a constitution, rather they need to experience and enjoy freedom. He feared that the victors of an election would be groups that are already organized, specifically the Shi'a whose clerics he believes receive instructions from Iran, and who would be hostile to gulf countries. He clarified he is not opposed to a Shi'a regime; he is opposed to a religious, Shi'a regime.

Containment Best Solution to Iranian Problem

3. (C) Turning to Iran's role in the region, Al-Sager said the U.S. erred by not fully consulting Iraq's neighbors -- Syria and Iran -- when it made the decision to liberate Iraq. As a result, Iraq's borders were not adequately secured, facilitating the entry of terrorist groups. He stated Iran remains determined to build a nuclear device and said the use of force was not a viable deterrent. He added that public attacks against Iran would only encourage its nuclear aspirations and cause Iranians to rally around the flag. He called for containment of the GOI which, in his view, can only be achieved with the full participation of European allies.

GOK Committed to Women's Rights and Iraqi Debt relief?

4. (C) Al-Sager then addressed issues currently before the National Assembly, describing debt relief for Iraq as the most important. He said Kuwait should have forgiven the debt long ago as there is no real expectation the GOK will ever receive any money from Iraq. He called for the GOK to invest in Iraq's infrastructure and people by building schools and hospitals, creating an IT city, and improving the Iraqi mentality. He argued that this type of focus would benefit both Kuwait and Iraq. He denounced the USD 60M already

earmarked by Kuwait for Iraq (reftel) as "peanuts" and said the GOK could afford a serious investment in its neighboring country. Referring to both Iraqi debt and women's suffrage, Al-Sager said if the GOK was truly committed, it could easily pass the appropriate legislation. Notwithstanding the growing presence of Islamists in the National Assembly, the GOK maintains adequate influence to pass any legislation it desires, providing it makes an effort. Further commenting on voting rights for women, Al-Sager said he introduced the legislation that previously failed, and took no action this year because the GOK said it wanted to table the issue. He agreed because he believes legislation introduced by the Government carries more weight and the onus to defend the legislation would then lie with the GOK. He considered repeated failures to secure voting rights for women to be indicative of severe internal problems within the GOK or a serious lack of interest.

#### Ambassador Presses for Parliamentary Action on Article 98

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15. (C) The Ambassador thanked Al-Sager for his candor and said he looked forward to future exchanges on how the U.S. and GOK can broaden and deepen relations, stressing the need to think strategically and about the long-term. The Ambassador also emphasized the need to conclude the Article 98 Agreement and offered to brief members of Al-Sager's committee if he thought that would help in bringing the Article to the floor for a vote. (Note: Ambassador followed up with a phone call to Al-Sager on December 5 to prompt Article 98 Action. End Note)

16. (U) Baghdad: Minimize considered.

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